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CIA Checkup

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The periodic question of what to do about the Central Intelligence Agency is being posed with increasing emphasis, and it seems that a sound and workable answer may be near. The question concerns the paradox of a secret organization in a free society and how to handle it so that the necessary security of the CIA will be protected and the public will be assured that its best interests are being served and that the CIA is not "running away" with foreign policy through its clandestine operations.

At present the CIA is under the occasional scrutiny of four congressional committees: the armed services and the appropriations committees of each house. The foreign relations committees now want to get in on it, perhaps through CIA subcommittees of their own. But if four committees have not been able to dispel fears and anxieties about the CIA even in congressional minds, two more are not likely to do so.

The most reasonable suggestion

seems to be that to set up a joint committee for the CIA patterned on the highly respected and quietly effective joint committee on atomic energy. Such a committee would, by law, be kept regularly and fully informed of all aspects of CIA operations. It could be expected to match the atomic energy committee's record of no security leaks, and would enjoy the status of a special committee made up of knowledgeable and responsible men in whom the public could conscientiously put its trust.

It cannot be expected that such action would end the CIA's role of whipping boy or prevent embarrassing miscalculations. Such are inherent in the business of active espionage in a world furnished like a political hall of mirrors. But a respected watchdog committee could act as a strong corrective to unwise tendencies in the CIA and at the same time focus a less grudging public support on the CIA as an organization required by the nature of the times to protect the security of our country.